

Against Green Minority Government? Themes and Traditions in Tasmanian Politics

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Introduction

In Tasmanian terms, the green political agenda founded in 1972 by the United Tasmania Group was a radical attempt to construct a new, value based, transformative politics; not only in natural resource management, but also in technology, work, society, institutional design and state development.¹ The Labor Party failed to incorporate this emergent agenda and politics, and was subsequently the hardest hit electorally by the political greening that followed. Following the Green split off from its support base, Labor was unable to form majority government from 1977 until 1998 and only then following parliamentary reform. Despite being the first to go into minority government with Green support, and despite failed internal efforts to 'green' the Labor Party that have persisted for years, it has been Labor that has most felt an adverse electoral impact from the Greens. Whilst Labor has had the most to gain in electoral terms from reintegrating the green vote, it has instead, it is argued here, resisted green policy agendas, destabilised governing arrangements with green partners, and achieved parliamentary reform aimed at reducing Green parliamentary representation. This resistance by mainstream Labor helped achieve the failure of the Green supported Labor minority government in 1992², and encouraged the frustrated abandonment of the Green supported Liberal minority government in 1998.³

The minority government Labor formed in an Accord with the Greens (1989-92) was viewed by many within the Labor Party as a chance to reintegrate its aberrant green rump back into its electoral base.⁴ But whilst

1 United Tasmania Group, 'The New Ethic', in Cassandra Pybus and Richard Flanagan (eds), *The Rest of the World is Watching: Tasmania and the Greens*, Sydney, 1990, pp 34-6.

2 PR Hay and R Eckersley, 'Tasmania's Labor-Green Accord 1989-91: Lessons from Lilliput' *Environmental Politics*, vol 2, no 1, Spring, 1993, pp 88-93.

3 TJ McCall, 'Political Chronicles – Tasmania: July to December 1997', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol 44, no 2, 1998a, pp 298-308.

4 PR Hay, 'Green Politics "in the system"', in J Pakulski and S Crook (eds), *Ebbing of the Green Tide? Environmentalism, Public Opinion and the Media in Australia*, Occasional Paper Series, no 5, School of Sociology and Social Work, University of Tasmania, Hobart, 1998, pp 103-25.

accepting Green support to govern, Labor undermined any reintegration strategy by failing to consider policy reforms implicit in the green agenda, crucially in terms of state development. In spite of initiating many less contentious, yet worthwhile, environmental administrative reforms, the Accord was inevitably acrimonious and short-lived.⁵ Labor vowed it would never govern in minority with the Greens again, but would woo itself back into majority government, even if over the very long term.⁶ However it eventually abandoned its wooing strategy to achieve its ambition more mechanistically. In 1998, Labor gained Liberal support to amend the Hare-Clark electoral system used to elect the Lower House of Assembly by raising the electoral quota with the intent of 'minimising uncertainty', a widely recognised euphemism for reducing Green parliamentary representation.⁷ This parliamentary reform offered Labor an expedient, if less than democratic, means back to majority power and has frustrated the future hopes of many for Labor and the Greens to govern in alliance or coalition.⁸

Following the collapse of the Accord, there was a short-lived return to majority government. The Groom Liberal Government (1992-96) was elected in a backlash against the minority experience. Because this government failed to impress the electorate, minority government loomed again in 1996. Labor was in no position to return to majority power, having pursued political and policy agendas during the Accord that had achieved widespread alienation on many fronts, and having hit electoral rock bottom as a consequence. After the Accord and the Groom government experiences, and with the Greens now a viable political alternative, the electorate again drifted away from the major parties in the lead up to the 1996 election. In a legitimate bid to force drifting votes back into conventional party stables, the Labor and Liberal major parties professed 'no minority government deals' in a bid to distance themselves from the Greens. By contrast the Greens were preparing to govern with either party by setting out three

5 Hay and Eckersley, 'Tasmania's Labor-Green Accord', pp 88-93.

6 M Field, 'Progressive Government in Minority: a Contradiction in Terms', *Legislative Studies*, vol 11, no 2, Autumn, 1997, pp 62-7.

7 This is not how Labor argued for parliamentary reform. Reducing parliamentary expenditure to pay for the 40 per cent pay rise for politicians was the commonly expressed motivation for reform, with some concern also expressed about the role of the Legislative Council, which is yet to be addressed.

8 This was achieved by amending the Tasmanian Constitution Act. The Parliamentary Reform Bill 1998 (31/1998) passed by the Legislative Council on 23 July 1998. Although reference to the people for such a change is not required, it had been intended by Premier Rundle as a measure of good faith; see R Herr, 'State Democracy to be Lynched by Reforms', *Advocate*, 22 July 1998, p 11; M Mackerras, 'A More Solid Reflection of Popular Preferences', *The Australian*, 14 July 1998, p 13.

options for sharing power.⁹ As every poll had predicted, and despite a drop in the Green vote, neither major party received sufficient support in 1996 to govern in its own right. The Labor Party refused to cooperate with the Greens. As the party with the highest vote, the Liberals eventually agreed to form a minority government with Green support under a new leader, Tony Rundle, who agreed with the Greens' request to explore consensus-based mechanisms of improving government.¹⁰

This paper draws upon the themes and traditions in Tasmanian politics in an attempt to explain the acrimony between Labor and the Greens, and considers how it is that the Liberals and Greens found themselves more comfortable political bedfellows between 1996-98 than Labor and the Greens did during the Accord. It argues that the 'coming of the Greens' has injected an unwelcome radicalism and political idealism into a state politics that had traditionally been defined by persona, place and conservative pragmatism. It also shows how the themes and traditions in Tasmanian politics before 1972, that had served to consolidate the Labor Party's domination over power, were so disrupted by the advent of green politics. Indeed, it argues that these have become the themes and traditions of a 'new conservatism' to which Labor appealed in 1998 as part of its strategy of winning back majority government, if not to reassert once back in office. The paper briefly considers both Green minority governments (1989-92; 1996-98), and the tensions during the 1996-98 Liberal-Green minority government that culminated in bipartisan parliamentary reform to regain majority power. It also finds Labor's struggle to return to political dominance and power in its own right to be as a key factor that worked against the success of Green minority government. For reasons of scope only, the paper is focused on the House of Assembly, rather than on the Tasmanian Legislative Council, arguably still one of Australia's most powerful upper houses.¹¹

Persona, Place & Conservative Pragmatism: Before 1972

In the most decentralised state in Australia, region and personality have long inspired a 'politics of brokerage' that has eclipsed doctrinal cleavages, leaving little policy difference between the major parties.¹² Before the

9 M Lester, 'Milne Power Game: Greens Set Out Formula for Minority Government in a Hung Parliament', *Mercury*, 20 February 1996, pp 1-2.

10 Lester, 'Milne Power Game', p 1.

11 This difficult choice is based on the Greens' presence only in the lower House of Assembly.

12 GC Sharman, 'The Politics of Brokerage', *Current Affairs Bulletin*, vol 53, 1977, p 22.

coming of the Greens, rather than being intellectually or ideologically inspired, politics in the small island state has been portrayed as simply about interests.¹³ The Hare-Clark electoral system of proportional representation has served to underline this interest-based politics in such a localised fashion that candidates often turn upon their own party's policies.¹⁴ Whilst the election of independents has been commonplace, with some of these holding the balance of power, the party system pattern in Tasmania at least since 1945 has tended to be characterized as dominant (Labor)/subordinate (Liberals).¹⁵ Prior to 1972, Tasmania's major parties were considered 'moderate and conservative', and minor parties did not fair as well as independents, with no third party clearly emerging.¹⁶ Independents held the balance of power after the 1934 election, enabling Labor under Albert Ogilvie to govern; keeping Labor under Robert Cosgrove in power after the 1948 election; and supporting Labor under Eric Reece in the 1950s.¹⁷ Each of these iconic Labor Premiers, much revered historically by their own party and state, did not therefore always govern in majority.

Whilst it is true to say that green politics injected previously unknown ideological stakes into political contestation in Tasmania, it is untrue to say that they disrupted majority government, given this history of independent representation. What they have done, however, is to provide a viable third party option, impact adversely upon the Labor vote, and increase the likelihood of minority government. By accommodating independents, Labor had been able to dominate state politics, holding office for most of the years 1934-1982 (with the exception of 1969-72) until the election of the Liberals in 1982.¹⁸ However, Labor was dominant (in terms of seats won) only between 1934-1950; between 1976-79 for example Labor only held

13 R Chapman, G Smith, J Warden and B Davis, 'Tasmania', in B. Galligan (ed), *Australian State Politics*, Melbourne, 1986, p 117; WA Townsley, *The Government of Tasmania*, St Lucia, 1976, p 41.

14 M Mackerras, 'The Operation and Significance of the Hare-Clark System', in M Haward and J Warden (eds.), *An Australian Democrat: The Life, Work, and Consequences of Andrew Inglis Clark* Hobart, 1995, pp 163-80.

15 C Sharman, G Smith and J Moon, 'The Party System and Change of Regime: The Structure of Partisan Choice in Tasmania and Western Australia', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol 26, no 3, November 1991, p 417.

16 Townsley, *The Government of Tasmania*, p 62.

17 M Haward and G Smith, 'The 1989 Tasmanian Election: the Green Independents Consolidate', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol 2, no 5, 1990, pp 196-217; WA Townsley, 'Independents and the Balance of Power in the Tasmanian House of Assembly', *Edgeways*, Summer 1988, p 11. Majorities were difficult to achieve in the even numbered House of Assembly prior to 1959.

18 Sharman et al, 'The Party System and Change of Regime', p 411. These authors find the new Liberal Gray government much like the previous one in terms of dominance and of policy results.

power by a one-seat majority. Furthermore, as noted above, Labor relied upon independents to break into and twice to hold onto power throughout its long period of dominance. Indeed, the non-Labor block was only one seat behind Labor in 1934; whilst the Liberal party was only one seat behind in the periods 1950-55, 1959-64 and 1976-79, and held equal seats on a lesser percentage of votes between 1956-59.¹⁹ Rather than disrupting majority government in Tasmania, then, it appears that the Greens recast delicately balanced electoral patterns sufficient to expose what had historically been a slender Labor lead in the relatively small House of Assembly.

Before the advent of the Greens, political contestation in Tasmania was certainly distinguished by its lack of doctrinal disputes and theorising;²⁰ it was low key and dispassionate, kicking into gear only for the pragmatic purposes of electioneering.²¹ Parliamentary members have always been conscious of the need, in Hare-Clark's multi-member constituencies, to campaign against the members of their own party as much as against their political opponents to retain their seats. Hence the enduring significance of personality, region and brokerage that others have identified as critical to the parochial deal making that has constituted true political practice in Tasmania.²² In essence, the 'politics of brokerage' has involved the identification and satisfaction of regional needs often by local figures who rise to political prominence and who may then be electorally rewarded for their efforts. Political doctrine and policy platforms have only been relevant where these complement rather than detract from such efforts. Politics in general has therefore been both accommodationist of independents, who did not constitute the party political force that the Greens were to, and responsive to locality. Locality was a concept that the Greens were also to recast in a cleaner, greener, more self-sufficient light.

In the absence of political ideology, it has been a preoccupation with the development and survival of its peripheral island economy that has always driven Tasmanian politics, more so than any defining political philosophies or idealism. There has historically been, and is still, little difference in approach to development between the major political parties,

19 Townsley, 'Independents and the Balance of Power', p 11; see also election results available at <http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/tpl/elections/ElectionInfo.htm>. Note also that only 54 per cent of governments were majorities between 1909-96, S Bennett, 'The Reduction in the Size of the Tasmanian Parliament', Research Note 2 1998-99, Parliament of Australia, Parliamentary Library, Canberra.

20 There was at least one exception. Social credit ideology did help Labor to power in the Depression.

21 R Herr, 'Hare-Clark: the Electoral Legacy', in Haward and Warden, *An Australian Democrat*, p 187; Townsley, *The Government of Tasmania*, pp 64-66.

22 Sharman, 'The Politics of Brokerage', pp 15-23.

albeit that Labor has more typically responded to trade union concerns, on hydroindustrialisation and forestry in particular, and the Liberals to their business constituency. The themes that have resonated instead of political ideology, and that have been given expression in the practice of hydroindustrialisation from the 1930s,²³ include the island survival theme; the state development theme; the theme of underwriting industry; the leadership theme; and the theme of consolidating power. Together these themes have defined a distinctly Tasmanian politics of persona, place and conservative pragmatism that again was to be disrupted, recast and reinterpreted by the emergence of the Greens.²⁴ Tasmania is Australia's only island state, its most peripheral state, the state most recognised for the quality of its natural environment, and home to the world's first Green party.

The island survival theme in particular underpins state politics. It is a theme riddled with contradictions whereby 'island' is both obstacle, in terms of economic self-reliance, and opportunity, in terms of a unique niche economy. The problems with the island's peripheral, natural resource based economy continue to be well documented, perhaps never more succinctly than by the Callaghan inquiry into the structure of industry and employment in Tasmania.²⁵ The Callaghan fix to Tasmania's physical and economic remoteness, and its fatal dependence upon external markets, was to replace imports, to foster local markets and control, and, critically, to develop small business. The traditional state development fix of underwriting industry by offering inducements to large scale external businesses to set up branch operations in the state, championed on the whole by iconic Labor Premiers, only exacerbated its vulnerability.²⁶ Nevertheless it was certainly Labor that emerged as the natural party of government by best weaving together the themes of island economy, state development and strong leadership into a hydro-industrial industry attraction strategy. The support of unions, big business, the hydro-bureaucracy, and even Labor's political opponents, for this strategy, ensured that Labor consolidated its grip upon political power. The emergence of green politics was to be a disruption by breaking Labor's political dominance, introducing greener development

23 PR Hay, 'Will the "Tasmanian Disease" Spread to the Mainland? The Politics of Land Use Conflict', *Current Affairs Bulletin*, vol 64, no 3, 1987, pp 4-12.

24 K Crowley, 'The Rise and Rise of the Tasmanian Greens: The State Election 2002', *Environmental Politics*, vol 12, no 1, 2003, p 234.

25 B Callaghan, *Inquiry into the Structure of Industry & the Employment Situation in Tasmania*, Canberra, 1977. Recent reports include P Nixon, *The Nixon Report: Tasmania into the 21st Century*, Hobart, 1997, and Government of Tasmania, *Directions for Information Technology and Advanced Telecommunications*, Hobart, 1997.

26 Hay, 'Will the "Tasmanian Disease" Spread?', pp 4-12.

choices, and offering starker policy alternatives that clearly distinguished the Greens from the major parties.

The Coming of the Greens: After 1972

The emergence of an environmental political force in Tasmania, from the fertile ground of its long term and historically significant conservation movement, has been a severe disruption to the states' political tradition on several fronts. It is well documented that environmental politics was born in Tasmania out of the frustration of conservationists with the bipartisan plan to flood the Lake Pedder, the incomparable, exquisite jewel in the heart of the state's South West wilderness.²⁷ The United Tasmanian Group (UTG), the world's very first green party, was founded in a last ditch conservationist bid to save Lake Pedder by contesting the 1972 state election; ironically finding itself campaigning against state bureaucracy, namely the Hydro-Electric Commission (HEC). After the founding of the UTG, the idealistic conservationists of the 1970s hardened into the political realists of the 1980s, who willingly played traditional politics in an effort to avert any further ecological tragedies. The political skill of these environmentalists, and the broadening of their political campaigns, ensured their steady entry into the House of Assembly as green independents throughout the 1980s, culminating in the realisation of the UTG's dream of achieving the balance of power by supporting the minority Labor government in 1989 and subsequently forming the Tasmanian Greens.²⁸

Even so, Tasmania's early conservationists were not political activists in the contemporary sense, as their failure to save Lake Pedder attests; neither was public policy in the 1970s as readily influenced by public debate. Had Lake Pedder survived in its natural state, it would feature today as one of Australia's most significant natural icons.²⁹ Nevertheless, once the bipartisan state development agenda threatened the South West wilderness, and given the representative capacity of the Hare-Clark electoral system, the political path beckoned. When conservationists and environmentalists entered state politics, they brought with them notions of place, development, industry, leadership and political power that still defy traditional political norms. Whilst the major parties have long advocated the transformation of Tasmania's environment in order to realise its value, conservationists have

27 Pybus and Flanagan, *The Rest of the World is Watching*; Haward and G Smith, 'The 1989 Tasmanian Election', pp 196-217.

28 Lester, 'Milne Power Game', p 1; Hay and Eckersley, 'Tasmania's Labor-Green Accord', pp 88-93; D Johnson, *Lake Pedder: Why a National Park Must Be Saved*, Adelaide, 1972.

29 PR Hay, Commentary made on the film *Lake Pedder* Lindfield, 1997.

advocated an economy built upon the preservation of the island's natural state. Green politicians today still receive mixed support at best from the major parties in their attempts to protect natural areas from exploitation.³⁰ Similarly, subsidies to large resource exploiting industries such as forestry are not welcomed by conservationists, environmentalists or green politicians, who see state funds as better deployed in fostering clean, green industries. Green politicians have also brought previously unknown notions of political transparency and bureaucratic accountability to Tasmanian politics, such as the introduction of freedom of information legislation, much as the environmental movement has done in the global context.³¹

So much for the green disruption to bipartisan political themes, tradition and development consensus in Tasmania. Perhaps more lethal for the long term viability of the parliamentary Greens in particular was their disruption to Labor's traditional electoral support base. As we saw above, political folklore has cast the Labor Party as electorally dominant in Tasmania for much of this last century for its ability to win government, without recognising the slender character of this dominance of government in fact. Indeed a great part of the Labor skill of retaining power for all of this time was the ability of its iconic leaders literally to cobble together vital partnerships by indulging the agendas of various independents and at times localities in order to govern.³² Certainly the pressures involved were lessened, though not eliminated, with the increase in House of Assembly members from 30 to 35 in 1959 for the purposes of achieving greater stability.³³ However, in the character of Tasmanian politics, these partnerships came largely without ideological baggage, the independent GS Carruthers notwithstanding (who initially helped Ogilvie to power in 1934 in return for his support for social credit theory).³⁴ However, the green agenda is more ideologically driven than major party politics, however pragmatically pursued, to the extent of considerably straining relations with partners in government.

After the Australian Democrats gained a foothold in the House of Assembly in 1980, they and their Green independent successors (Bob

30 Hay, 'Will the "Tasmanian Disease" Spread?', pp 4-12.

31 RC Paehlke, 'Democracy & Environmentalism: Opening a Door to the Administrative State', in RC Paehlke and D Torgerson (eds), *Managing Leviathan: Environmental Politics and the Administrative State*, Peterborough, 1990, pp 35-58.

32 WA Townsley, *Tasmania: From Colony to Statehood*, Hobart, 1991; WA Townsley, *Tasmania: Microcosm of Federation or Vassal State, 1945-83*, Hobart, 1994.

33 T Newman, *Hare-Clark in Tasmania: Representation of all Opinions*, Hobart, 1992, p 92.

34 Townsley, 'Independents and the Balance of Power in the Tasmanian House of Assembly', p 11.

Brown elected 1982; Gerry Bates 1986; and Christine Milne, Di Hollister and Lance Armstrong, 1989) did battle primarily with Labor over conservation issues.³⁵ It was Labor's electoral stakes that initially suffered after the coming of the Greens. There followed the loss of public faith in Labor's conservationist credentials after Lake Pedder's inundation at the hands of Labor Premier 'Electric' Eric Reece; the desertion of party faithful over its equivocal handling of the Franklin dam dispute in the early 1980s; and the forthright manner in which the Liberal Opposition, led by Robyn Gray, assumed the mantle of hydro-developer and protector of state's rights in the face of federal concern over the Franklin dam proposal.³⁶ The resultant schism within both Labor and its support base post 1982 threatened to inflict fundamental electoral damage, with the significant scattering of Labor's constituency to both the left (i.e. to the Greens) and right (i.e. the Liberals) indicating contradictory paths towards its rebuilding. Throughout the 1980s, the votes Labor lost to the Liberals slipped further from its grasp as Premier Robin Gray successfully modelled himself in the strident, traditional Labor leadership style of Ogilvie, Cosgrove and Reece.

Meanwhile, the broadening of green political concerns to include urban environmental and agricultural issues, democratised policy process, political transparency and 'clean green' industrial development further threatened Labor. The departure of Norm Sanders left the Australian Democrats a spent force in Tasmania; and Bob Brown inherited the green vote on a recount. This vote strengthened and diversified with the 1986 election of Dr Gerry Bates, an academic and popular environmental lawyer, who carved out a rural-residential support base in the electorate of Franklin following his advocacy on behalf of residents opposed to the Electrolux silicon smelter. Christine Milne, Di Hollister and Lance Armstrong joined their Green parliamentary colleagues in 1989, achieving electoral prominence via the statewide protest against the proposed billion dollar Wesley Vale pulp mill.³⁷ Despite Robin Gray's conservative capture of much of its support base, Labor has justifiably always blamed conservationists in general, and their tactical foray into state politics in particular, for its own fall from political grace from the 1980s. Between 1982-1992, while Greens were steadily taking more seats in the House, Labor's share of primary votes cast at state elections was plummeting from its new low of 35.1 per cent (1986)

35 D Lowe, *The Price of Power: the Politics behind the Tasmanian Dams Case*, South Melbourne, 1984, p 108.

36 B Davis, 'The Struggle for South West Tasmania', in R Scott (ed), *Interest Groups & Public Policy* Melbourne, 1980, pp 152-169; Lowe, *The Price of Power*.

37 Hay and Eckersley, 'Tasmania's Labor-Green Accord', p 88; Hay, 'Green Politics', pp 103-25.

to its rock bottom of 28.9 per cent (1992) following the collapse of the Field Labor minority government.

Against Green Minority Government?

The Labor-Green Parliamentary Accord, 1989-92

Given the tensions between Labor and the Greens on conservation and state development, the circumstances in which the Labor-Green Parliamentary Accord had been struck in 1989 were not auspicious for Labor-environmental relations. While the Greens were flush from the electoral success of five of their members, and from their thwarting of the Wesley Vale pulp mill, Labor had fallen from 1986 to another unprecedented low of 34.7 per cent in 1989. Hay argues that Labor saw the signing of the Accord, and the significant conservation concessions that it formally gave to the Greens, as its final dealings with them before settling down to attempt to govern alone.³⁸ He argues that the Greens took some time to realise this.³⁹ The Greens had hoped to partner a shift to progressive government; to pursue green, social justice and state development reforms; and to see power return from the executive to the floor of parliament. In more pragmatic terms, the Greens used the Accord agreement to achieve directly as minority government supporters what they had been unable to achieve as a collection of independents in opposition. Beyond this, the political potential of the Greens was thwarted before it began, but Labor's own policy agenda was also to fall prey to budgetary influences as the extent of state debt became clear. The result was unexpected 'scorched earth' budgetary policy that the Accord bound the Greens into supporting, and that saw massive demonstrations and disaffection from even Labor's own dwindling trade union based heartland.⁴⁰ This was most particularly the case with public sector unions such as the Tasmanian Teachers Federation, the Health Services Union of Australia, the Police Association of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Public Service Association.⁴¹

In fact, in its short period in government, and from its lowest-ever electoral support base, the Labor minority government achieved a widespread alienation of key constituents that guaranteed its poor showing at the post Accord poll. These included those traditionalists who had

38 Hay, 'Green Politics', pp 103-25.

39 Hay and Eckersley, 'Tasmania's Labor-Green Accord', p 88-93; M Haward and P Lamour (eds), *The Tasmanian Parliamentary Accord and Public Policy 1989 - 1992: Accommodating the New Politics?*, Canberra, 1993.

40 A Fisher, 'Alarm Bells in Jingle Free Election', *The Bulletin*, 21 January 1992, p 19.

41 RJ Lindsay, 'Industrial Relations and the Accord', in Haward and Lamour, *The Tasmanian Parliamentary Accord*, pp 196-205.

felt betrayed by Labor forging an alliance with 'greenies'; those environmentalists who realised that Labor had spurned the spirit of the Accord before the ink had dried upon it; those public sector employees, including many hard core unionists, who were angered over the loss of their jobs; and all those voters who felt betrayed by the government's retreat from its policy promises given in the lead up to the 1989 election. After only thirty months, the Greens themselves withdrew their support for the minority government having been outmanoeuvred by their Accord partners for much of this time. The initial break in the relationship came in October 1990 when Labor raised the wood-chip export quota above the level of 2.889 million tonnes per year, thus breaching a key Accord agreement. The Greens maintained confidence in the government until the end of 1991 when they withdrew confidence, again over forest policy.⁴² With Labor planning resource security legislation for the forest industry that was blocked by the Greens, there was nowhere left for the Labor government to go at the 1992 election, as Pybus rightly predicted, but down.⁴³

The failure of the Green-Labor Accord represented the abject failure of Labor's 'reintegration of the aberrant green vote' strategy and the efforts of its own environmental constituency to green the party from within. In the wake of this, it seemed inconceivable that Labor would ever reinvent itself as environmentally progressive and aware; able to envision a clean, green, clever Tasmania; and appreciative of the intrinsic value of Tasmania's natural capital. Despite the efforts of some party members, this role remains an anathema to the utilitarian party of industrial and natural resource development that built its political stronghold on a policy of hydroindustrialisation that destroyed Tasmanian wilderness. At the 1992 election, Labor's support hit rock bottom. The Greens also suffered losses, yet retained their five seats. The Accord, as it had played out, with the accusations of brinkmanship and dirty tricks from both sides, had not worked for either partner. But it was Labor that had its members and electoral candidates sign a pledge of no more minority government with the Greens. If Labor had hoped that the green vote would be short lived, for example as 'socio-economic' orientation eclipsed the 'quality of life' environmental concerns of the voters, it was mistaken. After the Accord, Labor burnt its bridges with the Greens, dedicating itself to recapturing majority power, and left it to the Liberals to form the next Green supported majority government, rightly reckoning that this would eventually be to its own advantage.⁴⁴

42 Haward and Lamour, *The Tasmanian Parliamentary Accord*.

43 C Pybus, 'For Napoleon, there's nowhere to go but down', *Australian Society*, vol 10, no 11, November 1991, pp 20-1.

44 Field, 'Progressive Government in Minority', pp 62-7.

The Green Liberal Government Alliance, 1996-98

Although not natural allies of the Greens, the Liberals did not have the same historical, electoral or personal obstacles to working with them as did Labor, Premier Gray's passion for the Franklin dam, the Wesley Vale pulp mill and for fast tracking anti-environmental decision making notwithstanding. Furthermore, the short-lived Bethune Liberal government, 1969-72, had been the most environmentally progressive in Tasmania's history to date, legislating state environmental controls and national parks administration into existence.⁴⁵ Similarly, after a period of strident anti-environmentalism, even the Gray government managed to achieve a degree of light green ecological self-reinvention. This was achieved largely through the efforts of Liberal Environment Minister Peter Hodgman to achieve un-contentious environmental improvements (i.e. less waste; and cleaner air and rivers). His brother, Liberal Michael Hodgman, had been one of the few Tasmanian politicians to publicly question Labor's plans to flood Lake Pedder, and to express regret at its loss. Liberal majority government was returned at the 1992 election, and the Groom Liberal Government persisted with many of the Accord's environmental reforms from 1992-1996. However, there is no doubt that the most obvious obstacle to Liberal-Green relations at this time was deposed Premier Robin Gray, even though, as Primary Industry Minister in Groom's government, he suggested that we are all green now.

After the 1996 election, neither major party had the numbers to govern. The Liberals and Labor returned 41 per cent and 40 per cent respectively, and the Greens returned 11 per cent, again ensuring that they would hold the balance of power, as had been predicted.⁴⁶ Labor was in no position to offer to enter into another Accord with the Greens, and as the major party with the lesser vote, it had no obligation to either. Labor had campaigned hard on 'No Deals with the Greens' and had benefited electorally from this and the public's dissatisfaction with the Groom government—its 40 per cent pay rise for politicians in particular. Labor was also happy to see a Liberal-Green partnership struck, knowing that it would be the sole beneficiary in the wake of its inevitable demise, and guaranteed to keep the Liberal government in power until it could hand down its first budget. Despite the misgivings of their business constituency, the Liberals eased into an alliance, rather than a formal Accord, with the Greens. As Herr points out, the Liberals had already been in government, and as the major party with the highest vote were unable to refuse to govern on

45 Lowe, *The Price of Power*; Haward and Lamour, *The Tasmanian Parliamentary Accord*.

46 K Crowley, 'The Tasmanian State Election 1996: Green Power and Hung Parliaments', *Environmental Politics*, vol 5, no 3, 1996, pp 530-535.

constitutional grounds, making the Liberal-Green partnership inevitable.⁴⁷ Most crucially, the change in both Liberal and Green leadership, to Tony Rundle and Christine Milne respectively, also considerably eased negotiations, Rundle proving more accommodationist than Groom, and Milne espousing a new consultative politics that departed from Bob Brown's hard nosed adversarialism.

Although the Greens managed to get 'clean-green' principles into Rundle's Directions policy agenda, many of the early gains of the Liberal-Green alliance were process related, or to do with social reform, and left the Greens struggling to make the environmental difference, on forestry for instance, that their supporters expected. The Greens were absolutely critical to achieving gun law reform, gay law reform, an apology to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community's stolen children, the disaggregation of the monolithic HEC and so forth. Many such initiatives were negotiated behind closed doors with no credit attributed, in keeping with the nature of this 'alliance' in power. The Greens achieved televised Parliament; amended and modernised Standing Orders (in particular to both achieve gender neutrality in language and to introduce decorum into the debate of both Houses); and an all-party forum to canvass reform issues and legislative initiatives.⁴⁸ The Liberal Speaker of the Lower House of Assembly also praised the accountability, efficiency and accelerated reformist style of the Rundle minority government. It makes for good Parliament, he argued, when there is little filibustering, no repeated quorum calls, no late night sittings, no use of the gag, mutually agreed adjournments, and institutionalised facilitation of private members' bills.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the tensions that would sink this government were building.⁵⁰

The Parliamentary 'Reform' Agenda

Parliamentary reform has long been a euphemism for reducing parliamentary numbers in Tasmania, and more recently for ridding the House of the Greens. Contemporary efforts to downsize Tasmania's House of Assembly

47 RA Herr, 'Reducing Parliament and Minority Government in Tasmania: Strange Bedfellows Make Politics - Badly', *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, vol 20, no 2, 2005, pp 130-43.

48 C Milne, 'Long Live Minority Government: All Party Forum Delivers Many Gains', *Daily Planet*, no 42, May-June 1996, p 6.

49 F Madill, 'Love and Hate Under the Hare-Clark', *Legislative Studies*, vol 11, no 2, 1997, pp 68-74.

50 K Crowley, 'Strained Relations: Governing in Minority in Tasmania', *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, vol 17, no 2, Spring 2003, pp 55-71.

date back at least to the early days of the Gray Liberal government, although not necessarily because it saw any threat from the emergence of the parliamentary Greens. There has long been a public perception of Tasmania as over-governed, and Gray responded by commissioning a committee of inquiry, with the Ogilvie report delivered in 1984.⁵¹ This report recommended no change to the status quo. A further inquiry was instigated by the Groom Liberal government⁵² under public pressure to justify 40 per cent pay rises for politicians, and produced the 1994 Morling report, which again recommended no change.⁵³ Nevertheless, this report did suggest that, if change were politically imperative, then the reduction should be a democratic one, and from 54 to 44 total members, keeping the Hare-Clark system intact in the House of Assembly.⁵⁴ The Legislative Council blocked this plan, even though the Groom government had unlinked it from politicians' pay raises. But this plan was, nevertheless, the proposal that the Rundle Liberal government initially ran with, unsuccessfully as it turned out, when subsequently in a minority government alliance with the Greens.⁵⁵

The failed parliamentary reform push by the Groom and Rundle governments, and thus the failure to justify the 40 per cent parliamentary pay rises that were awarded, played into Labor's hands as a means of rebuilding its shattered constituency. Added to this, the inevitable failure of the Liberal-Green alliance over core policy issues and directions was on the horizon, building the chances of Labor's return to majority government. It was up to Labor to exploit these circumstances if it was to

51 AG Ogilvie, G Foot and G Cartland, *Report of the Advisory Committee on the Proposed Reduction in Numbers of Members Elected to Both Houses of the Tasmanian Parliament*, Hobart, Parliament of Tasmania, 1984.

52 FR Groom (Premier, Chairman of Committee), *Reform of Parliament: House of Assembly Select Committee Terms of Reference*, Hobart, 1993.

53 T Morling, RJK Chapman, BR Archer and BK Miller, *Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Size and Constitution of the Tasmanian Parliament*, Hobart, 1994.

54 The composition was then thirty-five House of Assembly members elected from five seven-member electorates and nineteen Members of the Legislative Council (total fifty-four). The change suggested by the Morling Report was for twenty-eight House of Assembly members elected from four seven-member electorates and sixteen Members of the Legislative Council (total forty-four). The proposal eventually adopted was Labor's five five-member electorates and fifteen Members of the Legislative Council (total forty). The four-by-seven model had received majority assent (Liberal-Green), but was amended to the five-by-five model by the Legislative Council, and then returned to, and eventually passed by, the House of Assembly; C Milne, Leader, Tasmanian Greens, 20 May 1999, personal communication.

55 Tasmanian Parliamentary Library, 'Parliamentary Reform: Downsizing Parliament', Parliamentary Fact Sheet Series, Tasmanian Parliamentary Library, Hobart, 1998, <http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/tpl/reform.htm> (accessed November 2008).

return to majority power. At the 1996 election it had traded upon both issues with its slogans '40 per cent Never Forget' and 'No Deals with the Greens', and during the Liberal-Green alliance it produced a reform proposal that would have the effect of reducing green parliamentarians.⁵⁶ Premier Rundle declared that this scheme was all about stamping out the Hare-Clark system and removing minority representation from Tasmania's House of Assembly. But unable to achieve his own preferred reform model that was little threat to the Greens, and blocked by Labor from financing his budget program, Premier Rundle went to the polls in frustration two years before time, having first adopted Labor's parliamentary reform plan. This cut seats (from 35 to 25) and raised the electoral quota (from 12.5 per cent to 16.7 per cent) sufficient to minimise the election of any greens or independents.⁵⁷ Having failed to reintegrate or woo back the green vote, Labor's success with its reform scheme thus threatened to exclude Greens from parliament. As this paper has shown, the opposite has occurred over the last decade. However, the Greens did suffer the immediate effects of reform, even though they were the only party to have opposed the 40 per cent pay rise, consistently voting against it. They used the extra money to employ support staff that had been always denied them as a third party.⁵⁸

Labor was returned to majority government at the 1998 election, the beneficiary of both the failed Liberal-Green alliance and of parliamentary reform. Parliamentary reform has also helped return it to electoral dominance, with Labor holding power now for over a decade. The Liberals suffered a loss of support in 1998, following their failed minority government, to a new low of 38 per cent; not quite Labor's low of 28 per cent following the Labor-Green Accord's failure. The effect on the Greens was achieved as intended by the major parties in their reform bid to avert future Green supported minority governments. Whilst the Green vote dropped by only 1 per cent in 1998, to 10 per cent, the higher electoral quota saw Green parliamentary representation drop from four members to one. Subsequently, the Green vote has returned to more solid showings at the last two elections of 18 per cent (2002⁵⁹) and 16 per cent (2006⁶⁰), sufficient to return their representation to four members.

56 TJ McCall, 'Political Chronicles – Tasmania: January to June 1998', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol 44, no 4, 1998b, p 610.

57 Herr, 'Reducing Parliament and Minority Government', pp 130–43. As noted above the Legislative Council was also cut from nineteen to fifteen members.

58 L Armstrong, *Good God, He's Green: A History of Tasmanian Politics 1989–1996*, Sydney, 1997. This funding was eventually supplied by the Bacon Labor government.

59 K Crowley, 'Strained Relations', pp 55–71.

60 K Crowley, 'The Place of Nature? Electoral Politics and the Tasmanian Greens', *People*

If the effect of parliamentary reform was to reduce Green members, then this was short-lived; and neither has 'environment' proved an electoral fad as Labor had been hoping since the Accord's failure. The major parties are now themselves suffering from the parliamentary reform, with the Liberal opposition too diminished to cover shadow portfolios effectively or to aspire to majority government in the short term, and Labor with virtually no back bench and overly reliant on advisers to assist with ministerial responsibilities. Parliamentary reform is now recognised as a 'politically cynical', 'self interested' attempt to prevent Greens from being elected that has diminished parliamentary performance and led to the need for an ethics commission to hold a less able government to greater account.⁶¹

Conclusion

This paper has found that the Labor Party and Labor government has felt the most adverse electoral impact from the emergence of the Tasmanian parliamentary Greens but that it has failed to reintegrate the green vote by greening up Labor. It has found that Labor's struggle to return to power in its own right has been a key factor that has worked against the success of Green minority government. Rather than improve its own environmental credentials, Labor has instead resisted green agendas, destabilised governing arrangements with green partners, and achieved parliamentary reform aimed at reducing the number of Green parliamentarians. As we have seen, this resistance helped achieve the failure of the green supported Labor minority government in 1992, and encouraged the frustrated abandonment of the Green supported Liberal minority government in 1998. It can be concluded therefore that Labor's desire for electoral dominance is a key threat to the stability, longevity and policy productivity of Green supported minority government in Tasmania. Consequently, although it could be argued that there were no significant environmental outcomes from the Green-Liberal alliance, this paper found that it was a relatively more comfortable arrangement than the Green-Labor Accord. The question remains, however, as to why Labor has resisted an internal greening and remains so wedded to a conservative politics of environmental exploitation, forestry in particular, that ensures the ongoing electoral presence of green politics.

and Place, vol 16, no 2, 2008, pp 12-21.

61 S Neales, 'A Shrunk Concern', *Mercury*, 5 July 2008, p 33; W Crawford, 'More MPs, Better Checks', *Mercury*, 23 September 2008, p 25.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to acknowledge the insightful advice from the reviewers of this article.